

DIVERSITY WIN IN DA PUMPKIN PATCH:
(oh god they're at it again.)



A DIRKJAKE FANZINE

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SODA GARDEN

It was a hot midsummer morning, probably the hottest Earth C had seen yet that year. Dirk and Jake waddled across the (gracefully) overgrown weeds in their garden to get to their modest, but lively greenhouse. Jake was in full gardening gear (green apron and wide brim hat included), but Dirk's sense of dignity was too strong to play dress up—or wear hats, for that matter, so he'd preferred to step out of the house in sweats and flip flops. The heat made their shirts cling to their bodies uncomfortably and the only relief they found was in the occasional gust of wind. The cicadas' screech followed them along from all sides like an exceptionally irritating summer soundscape. Still, they were both in a good mood. They hadn't been too ambitious about their harvest goals, but they'd inexplicably ended up with the prospect of a pretty respectable salad: cherry tomatoes, beetroots, cucumbers, romaine lettuce and even some strawberries glistened in the morning dew like they'd either popped out of a vegetable seed catalogue or My Neighbor Totoro.

"*Are you fucking with me?* This shit is deadass Studio Ghibli food porn," Dirk gasped as they stepped inside.

"Keep it PG, darling dearest!"

"Jake, sometimes you sound like the friendly neighbor in a horror movie who mows your lawn by day and stuffs muffins with children's flesh and bones by night. You know what I'm saying? You should try toning down the American Dream propaganda, bro, this isn't the fifties."

"Stuff and nonsense, Dirk! I'm a modern gentleman. Besides, PG film ratings weren't established until about—two decades later, I reckon?" Jake laughed heartily. "But let's focus on the matter at hand, it's a picturesque harvest we're having!" the brunette noted as he crouched down to check the cucumbers.

"It really is, I still can't believe we grew all of this ourselves... We could easily put Tender Greens out of business."

"I told you you'd be good at it if only you tried!"

"Facts. My coke compost simply *couldn't* go wrong, the rest must have been all luck," Dirk shrugged sarcastically, joining his boyfriend on his quest to feel up every vegetable in sight.

"Excuse me? Your little soda trick wasn't all there was to it, was there! I'd say my singing had a say in our success as well, chap."

"Yeah, because the tomatoes obviously needed to hear you sing *As Long As He Needs Me* **every single day** to thrive," he snorted.

"By Jove... Of course they did!"

"Not buying it. You're just absurdly lucky with plants, man."

"That's what Jade says, but I must be doing something spanking right, if I do say so myself! No flowering shrub has perished under my care yet and I even got you to join me on my little vegetable patch enterprise! That's no trifling matter, mind you, you can be stubborn as a mule..."

"Alright, alright. Stop bragging and dragging me through the mud while you're at it. I say it's time we reap what we sowed already."

"Hehe, yessir," Jake agreed.

"Wait, I feel like we should be quoting a verse from the Bible to really sell our good Christian household front."

"Ah? What are you prattling about? We're not even—"

"Psalm 126:5, those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy... or something."

"Gadzooks, you leave me utterly gobsmacked, Dirk. Since *when* exactly do you know your Bible...?" Jake finally forgot about the beetroots and tomatoes and turned to Dirk with a huge question mark plastered on his expression.

"I don't, dumbass, I just looked it up. On my phone. As you do." Dirk pocketed his phone.

"And? Are you content with your findings?"

"Oh, very. I'm a changed man thanks to the teachings of our Lord and Savior... *Google*."

"You're just being a big goof-off right now."

"No shit, sometimes I'm unnecessary like that. Anyway, I'd say we've done enough fucking around. Shall we?"

"Do the honors, Mr. Strider!"

They fell silent as they—decidedly inexpertly—picked everything up and gathered it into a huge woven basket. The scene became the more bucolic when they washed their produce clean and it somehow managed to look even fresher. While they were at it, they seized the opportunity to refresh themselves a little, their freezing hands finding each other's arms and necks playfully. Dirk couldn't keep a gentle, adoring smile out of his face even if he tried and Jake simply had no qualms about showing his boyfriend his toothiest, brightest one.

When the session of merciless sun and (almost nauseant) lover frolicking made them light-headed enough, they looked for shelter in the cool shadow of their kitchen and turned their harvest into the salad they'd long dreamed of. They chopped the lettuce, halved the cherry tomatoes so that they wouldn't elude their forks, sliced the beetroots and cucumbers thinly (but not so much as to lose their crunch) and added canned corn and diced red onion. To top it off, they made a simple greek yogurt dressing with basil flakes, minced garlic and a generous drizzle of olive oil.

They proceeded to wolf it down like they hadn't eaten in years, but—to their credit—it wasn't so much about stuffing their stomachs as it was filling their hearts with pure unfiltered pride. This was a meal they'd grown from scratch and it mirrored the way they'd picked their shattered relationship off the ground and made the best they could out of it.

These thoughts and more swam around their heads as they enjoyed their food and joked around, but they didn't care to put them into words, too afraid of ruining the moment or—even worse—realizing that the depth they perceived in such a mundane event was imagined.

It was after Jake finished clearing the table that he thought of putting the unspoken emotions into some sort of gesture. He sneaked up on Dirk—who

was doing the dishes almost too efficiently—and hugged him from behind. He hoped the tenderness made up for all the times that words had failed them before.

"—*Whoa*, watch the crockery. We just bought these," Dirk complained.

"Whoops-a-daisy! My apologies, angel face! So... Whatcha think about trying our hand at growing a good ol' pumpkin patch next? We might be a little late already, but I read this is a good season to start!"

"Pumpkins? Sure, sounds good to me."

"Yeah?" Jake buried his nose in the crook of Dirk's neck, tightening his hold all around him. Since the blond's hands were a little busy, he affectionately rubbed his face against Jake's as an answer.

"Yeah. We could ring up our pals when the fuckers are all ripe and bursting with vitamins and have a pie party like true senior citizens. Because we're so fucking domestic we've practically become Bert and Ernie."

"Hmmm. You'd be Bert, right?"

"Pft, what kind of question is that? Of course I'd be Bert," Dirk laughed, finally turning around to wrap his arms around Jake's shoulders, forearms outstretched to avoid getting soap on him. Their glasses bonked awkwardly as they leaned in for a kiss, so they pressed their noses together instead.

"Dag gummit, bro, the tenderness... My heart is about to give out," Jake giggled, his voice full of warmth.

"Haha, why aren't you wearing your life alert, old man?" Dirk smiled back softly, then reflectively. "Hey, Jake?"

"Hmhm?"

"I—uh, remind me to punch myself after the schmaltzy stuff I'm about to say, but... I'm so glad that living together is working out for us that I feel like I should be saying something. This is— I just couldn't see myself having this as a teen. Imagine my past self's face if I told him that we now live in an idyllic suburban house with its lil welcome doormat and everything.

That we *really* are out here gardening and eating homegrown produce with our scrawny childhood crush who grew up to become a Hollywood hunk with the *firmest*, most *devastating* ass— Like, literally the nicest, most renowned ass in the entirety of this world... And it's me who's grabbing it? *Wow. Just wow*, this fucking slaughters the man, (the man being me). Okay, I'm digressing, but fuck, man, I made it big." Dirk pressed his face up to the safety of his lover's chest to hide how flustered he was getting and—more importantly—to work up the nerve to continue: "I don't know what to do with myself, but what I mean to say with all of this is... Thank you, Jake. I'm a sad excuse for a partner and I can't cook for shit, but I really, *really* lo—uh, **appreciate** you and I apparently can't even begin to express that coherently because I'm too emotionally constipated and/or stunted."

There was a pondering pause between them.

"Wowzers, now it's me who doesn't know what to do with himself! ... Let me tell you that I think that you're expressing yourself in a downright stellar fashion! I think you're an exceptional fella in the paramour department and I, uh, *appreciate* you greatly too, Dirk! Which is to say I also cherish you in a gay goo-goo eyes way... Which—bollocks! Why hedge our bets!—just means I love you very much. Over and above that, I'm *mucho* proud of you and the homely life we made transpire. Because, *boy, did we make it transpire!* Cross my heart, I've never felt so bloody married to another mister before in my whole life."

"I refuse to fuel this spoony inanity any longer, so come the fuck over here, jackass." Dirk yanked Jake's shirt forward and kissed him softly over and over again, sometimes missing his lips in favor of finding his cheeks and nose.

Jake just let himself be cherished, his lips answering with the imprint of a smile, his big hands returning every gesture with a gentleness that was electrifying.

After all, nowhere screamed home more than being in each other's arms.



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GT: Bro i think youre getting considerably pressed about this matter.

TT: I'm not getting pressed. You see this? This is the opposite of pressed right now. I've specifically tossed the entire basket of laundry around until they're as wrinkled as Gary Oldman's fittingly old chops after a particularly bad red. Malbec or something.

GT: Malbec isnt too bad.

TT: You'd drink dishwater. Anyway, the point is that I've absolutely desecrated the laundry.

GT: Im not sure that was the point actually.

TT: Yes it was. The point being made here is that I'm a maniac for wrinkled up laundry. Just sleep in it, I couldn't give a shit. Take a nice forty winks in it, get real fucking comfortable. I don't care. One could even say I'm not pressed.

GT: We were talking about captain planet.

TT: Correction, you were talking about Captain Planet.

GT: Yes! Then you said and i quote that he was nothing but an "annoying space peta fuck" and then **I** said you have no taste and you got a massive stick up your derriere about it.

TT: I did not.

GT: You sooo did!!

TT: That seems a far better predicament than the one I'm in right now. I'd gladly take being impaled rectally on any amount of "massive sticks" over the realisation that my own fucking boyfriend thinks I have shit taste in men. Have you brought up your lack of self esteem with your therapist lately?

GT: No ive been busy.

TT: Hm.

GT: Weve been discussing my how do you say issues processing my thoughts and emotions without outside validation.

TT: Why do you keep saying "how do you say" before words you clearly know how to say?

GT: Specifically weve been covering my need to seek guidance on our personal problems from strangers because i think bringing it up with anyone im close to will inevitably lead to them deciding im a schmuck and finding a better friend whose brain works.

TT: Okay.

TT: Side note, what's the deal with the notification I just got. Did you just tweet about this?

GT: Therapy is a work in progress dirk. Recovery isnt linear.

TT: Have you discussed the fact that you want to bone Captain Planet with your therapist too?

GT: No! Ay carumba strider you cant just spring that kind of salacious talk on her like that. Shes a professional lady!

TT: I can absolutely guarantee you she's heard worse.

GT: No she-- what do you mean WORSE??

GT: I refuse to listen to this kind of captain planet slander!!!

TT: It's not slander. Captain Planet is not hot.

GT: He is so hot!!!

TT: He is literally a dick who comes down from outer space on his high fucking horse to preach environmentalist crap at people and then peaces out. He has no redeeming qualities. Side note, if he at least had an actual high horse I could potentially see your point.

GT: Okay ONE whats so bad with environmentalism dirk?? Are you not USING our recycling bin???

TT: Is that why you got us that? So Captain Planet would come down and tell you what a good boy you are for helping the planet?

GT: IM NOT TOUCHING THAT!!!

GT: AND TWO!!! He does way more than that!

TT: He literally doesn't. He just comes down and drones on about making sure little Jimmy uses a compost bin and then fucks off back into space.

GT: Youve never even SEEN captain planet!! He does way more than that!!

TT: Literally name one time.
GT: OKAY!!! Well. He helped those kids!
TT: What kids.
GT: Those little rapsCALLIONS with their weird schism politics who kept yammering on about car bombs. I think they were er.....i want to say scottish? Anyway captain planet came down and set them on the straight and narrow and then the whole situation in those parts came out peachy keen! See!!
TT: ...
TT: Are you talking about the IRA? What the fuck does Captain Planet have to do with the Good Friday Agreement?
GT: What??
TT: You know. The fucking thing with Bill Clinton.
GT: Whos bill clinton?
TT: Former US president Bill Clinton.
GT: Im sorry dirk im really trying to care about history and politics for the sake of proving that captain planet is NOT boring but i literally couldnt give a toss.
GT: Im not WATCHING captain planet for the PLOT okay???
GT: HES HOT.
TT: Jesus fucking Christ, no he is not.
TT: That is the worst take I've literally ever heard.
TT: In an entirely out of character action for me, I am, in fact, kinkshaming.
GT: You fancy batman.
TT: So.
GT: Well im kinkshaming that!!!
TT: You can't shame me about Batman. Are you fucking serious? Are you implying they're even in the same league??
GT: Of course not. Batman sucks.
TT: He does not.
GT: Well no i suppose youre right. He has quite the opposite problem.
TT: Oh for fuck's sake.
GT: I dont know what you want me to say dirk. Batman is a selfish lover.
TT: I can't believe you're bringing this up.
TT: That's low, broski.

GT: Lower than batman ever gets.
GT: *Absofuckinglylutely suggestively.*
TT: Listen, okay. You're not watching Captain Planet for the plot. Similarly, I'm not reading Batman due to any interest I have in whether or not he eats out. That's not the point.
GT: Its kind of the point
TT: It literally doesn't matter.
GT: It does so! Ones hotness attributes are directly correlated with whether or not one feels theyd be lousy in the sack. Not struggling in the buggy so to speak.
TT: So to speak.
TT: Who is it that's speaking exactly? The ghost of a 1930s casino manager?
GT: Me so whist.
GT: Just admit it strider! Between thinking captain planet isnt sexy to wanting to bump uglies with a fellow who wont get up and personal with catwomans pussywagon you have bad taste in men!
TT: One, never call anyone's genitals that again.
TT: Never mention Catwoman's genitals again either, full stop.
GT: Its relevant to the discussion though.
TT: No.
TT: Two, fucking Batman is a nonissue. He's literally not even real.
GT: Okay so youve no imagination. Dutifully noted bro.
TT: Three, can you stop saying I have no taste in men when we're literally dating? I've no interest in participating in whatever weird masochism thing you're trying to do here.
GT: Its not masowhatsit.
TT: You literally could have just copy and pasted masochism instead of bastardising it.
GT: Its just such a long word dirk.
GT: Anyway its not masowhatever. Sometimes one has to be willing to bite their nose to spite their face physical impracticalities aside.
TT: Not the best use of that saying, but sure.

GT: Also while i may not have captain planets colouring i do at least put out so i can meet you somewhere in the middle on your supposed taste in men.

TT: How generous.

GT: Quite!

GT: And for your information i would absolutely assert that captain planet would ensure you get yours too.

TT: It's literally a children's show about recycling.

GT: A man who cares for the world similarly cares about rocking yours. *Winks!*

TT: Did you just tweet that?

GT: No im running a poll on whether captain planet or batman is hotter.

GT: Youre losing fyi.

TT: It's inherently rigged, jackass. They literally just vote for whatever you tell them to vote for.

GT: Blah blah BLAH! That sounds like the jibber jabber of a SORE LOSER!

TT: They're literally crocodiles, they have no concept or frame of reference for whether or not a human is sexy.

GT: And yet THEY know how to use the recycling bin!!!!

GT: They dont even have thumbs!!!!

GT: They just have these wee little claw thingies. Really theyre quite dotey. I dont have a breeze how theyre using twitter with those.

TT: Sigh.

TT: Sorry, correction. *Sigh,* with asterisks.

TT: If I use the recycling bin can you stop?

GT: Stop what exactly?

TT: Telling people that you think Captain Planet is hot.

TT: You might not care, but I don't want people thinking you have bad taste in dudes. I have a fucking reputation to hold up.

GT: HEY!!!

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When The Open Road Is Closing In

You took to driving in a way Dirk never did.

But sometimes he indulges your ever-present urge to pilot a car away into emptiness, passing the distant lights of cities where you appear on every TV screen, and forests or deserts or coastlines where your weekends with Jade haven't taken you yet. You'll entrust him with control of the music, and he'll ramble on about a project or you'll talk about story beats for the next episode of *Rumble in da Pumpkin Patch*. Or, miracle of miracles, the two of you will actually *talk* about things that have nothing to do with the show, engage in dialogic interplay or however the fuck *he'd* say it.

It feels on those nights like you're claiming the kind of thing you used to daydream about. Decontextualized fantasy had engrossed you for hours then, worlds where you lived in the same time and place. You knew of no plucky adventure film back then that started out with *so there's these two guys, and they're friends on the Internet*.

You knew not to talk to him too much on this theme. Surely it was easier for you, who at least *remembered* the touch of another living person. Who had the interactional company of a living Internet and not its static remnants, who could imagine Jane flying out to see him one day if he wanted, even if he never did want.

'Two guys and they're friends on the internet' can't drive in the same car into a night sky turned bright with stars. Their arms can't brush as one reaches over to fiddle with the radio, tuning in by accident to some discordant Carapacian classical music station, and the other smiles to himself at his oldest friend's affinity for the obscure. And this touch doesn't happen, so it doesn't feel temporarily, miraculously safe in the way touch hasn't tended to feel for a long time.

To have gotten any of it is a gift. To have survived the island and the game and everything else, to be able now to stay the night in his apartment, watch his faux-dignified half-laugh in person instead of trying to visualize his face, to have him indulge these drives even when you know that sometimes sitting too long in a confined space without even the simplest mechanical act of *doing* things drives him insane. It should be cue for *you* to know how to fit in with the happy ending you've been given.

Never disappear for days; never start thinking, in the middle of a kiss, about things that have nothing to do with it. Never freeze, never go silent, never mentally vacate the space you're occupying in the way you know concerns him.

Dirk is not with you tonight. He is back in the Carapacian Kingdom

apartment, building... something, and you are driving down what was once the East Coast of the continental United States. An old, sporadically maintained road, tall grass growing on each side; the shimmer of the moon off the surface of the ocean to your left. You haven't seen another car for miles now, so sometimes you slow enough to look sideways and watch the dark water.

It's reassuring that Dirk has things to work on. It is the one thing that makes your inability to fit in with the end of this story morally defensible. At least you know he is resourceful enough to not need you.

The voice comes as a surprise, as you think this.

Fuck, dude, how in your own head can you get? You're really walkin' around like you're the only person in this world who doesn't know how to live in it? Have you seen me, recently?

You curb your Hope powers enough to stop him from materializing as if he was a living being. The coexistence of two fully-fledged Dirks on one planet is... uncomfortable. You could dispel him altogether, you think, or at least relegate him to your head instead of sitting, Hope-manifested, in the passenger seat. But you don't. You say instead, out loud, "This may surprise you, but we're not a feelings-talking pair of guys."

And then a moment later, "Why are you here? The real you is not exactly inaccessible. Well, not moreso than usual."

Too fucked up about things you won't talk to me about to admit you miss me? That's cold, bro.

"Imagine me saying that to you in real life. 'Hey, Dirk, I miss you.' No, really, manifest that in your head, *bro*, me texting you that like it's normal. Imagine me accurately telling you *most* things, and see how you'd take it."

The wavering, half-transparent Dirk-image next to you is silent for a moment.

Infuriatingly so. "Nothing to tell me? No lectures on the modernist crisis of representation or whatever the fuck?"

Damn. What can you tell me about the modernist crisis of representation?

Unfairly furious at him, or maybe *yourself* – you are, after all, making up a guy and getting mad at him – you swerve off the road into a patch of shorter grass and slam the car into park. The ocean is perfectly, impassively still. A photographically-perfect little trail of light has been formed by the moon's reflection on the water, and the stars are brighter here, near the ocean, than most anywhere else in the world.

It shouldn't comfort you, a place like this. You're not sure it does. But the discomfort, watching the water like something horrible's about to surface from it with a terrible shriek, feels a little bit like home. Different from the brand new discomfort of a crowded city where everybody knows your name, that's for sure.

"I do listen to you sometimes, when you talk," you say out loud. "Sorry if that's surprising, or whatever."

Never said you didn't.

You always think I'm calling you stupid, and I never am. Mainly you call yourself stupid, and then attribute it to me or whoever else.

"You don't have to lie to me, either." You sound exhausted even to yourself. And then another moment of mutual silence, as you and the shadow of a familiar hunched posture watch the perfectly still expanse of ocean in front of you.

It's comforting, even if it shouldn't be, to know you're not puppeteering him. No puppet could be this infuriating.

"The crisis of representation, as per your illustrious Wikipedia-sourced monologues," you say at least, "means you can't say or write words that really capture anything accurately. You can write as much Strider-highbrow philosopoetry about – the ocean or whatever – as you want, it's never gonna be the real thing. Don't know why they needed a word for what sounds pretty fucking obvious to me, but that's what it is."

Why'd you think of it here, then? A sudden temptation to linguistically capture... this? You, staring at the ocean, alone?

"No, and somehow I think you know that." It comes out through gritted teeth. Then another silence. The Dirk of your brain ghost space is usually more talkative than this.

"Just - at least the sea's worth capturing," you add after he proves reticent. "The inside of my head is not. If there's words someone smarter could put to what's wrong with me, or whatever, they wouldn't be worth saying. They wouldn't fix anything. It's not that writing a shitty little novel to you about my feelings wouldn't be possible, it's that it wouldn't help."

I don't know. Feels like it's worth trying, at least.

"Feels like that's not your choice to make," you say, more poisonously than you'd meant to, and maybe you like having the last word with him too much – not like it gets to happen too much in life – because when you've glanced at the passenger seat again, it's empty.

You'd tell him if he was still here – the fake him, never the real him – that you wish it was his choice to make, more than anything. Wish someone else could choose for you to be only what everyone else wants you to be and nothing else, because you're still incapable of committing to that choice by yourself.

Still, in some gesture at committing to something you're trying, still, to make good, you pick up your phone and text Dirk

GT: Ill be back in the carapacian kingdom by tomorrow.

One of the more unfairly infuriating things about him is that, even when you know he's angry at you, he almost never takes more than a few minutes to respond to you.

TT: Thanks for letting me know.

TT: Drive safe, or whatever.

So maybe he's trying, too, if he'd tell you something you know embarrasses him. Like you're sixteen again.

You, who have not been sixteen for four years, put your phone away and watch the ocean for a minute longer. Then you turn around and drive back towards distant city lights.



A Kiss Will Surely Happen Later

If it had been up to you, you know exactly how you would have wanted everything to go down. In regards to Dirk, you mean.

All of you guys would have entered the game, no sweat! Your first ever meeting would've been great, hugs all around as you all excitedly clamor over the fact that you were able to get by without any major head injuries or just... Injuries in general. You would then proceed to get started with whatever Dirk had planned in regards to where all of you would be sleeping, what the goals would be while you stayed in the game, what might be lying in wait for all of you. Then, when it was just Dirk and you, because there is no doubt in your mind that you'd be left alone with him, it would happen.

You like to believe you would have the courage to approach Dirk first, maybe land a smooth line about how you know about his feelings and that you feel the same way! (You think.). But in all reality, you're sure he would've done it first seeing as he's never been one to beat around the bush. He would tell you that he likes you, always has since the two of you met online, and that it's alright if you don't feel the same way **don't worry about trying to pussyfoot around my feelings like they'll break with just one look. It's cool. I just wanted to get that off my chest now that we're here.** And you'd be listening intently as he rambles off nervously, not looking at you as he prepares himself for the rejection that will never come.

When he's done, you would smile at him and do your best to suppress your amusement because it'd be... Endearing how unsure he is. You would never have imagined you'd ever see a day when Dirk wasn't confident and sure with himself. You've known him for a long time now and you can't think of a day in which he ever second guessed himself, everything having to be either a solid positive or negative. Sure, he's been wrong before many times and yet remained confident even if he was caught with his pants at his ankles. Which you suppose you thought that was pretty cool, even if he still looked pretty stupid. You wish you could have his confidence in the face of trouble.

In this scenario, however, you would be just as brave as him, perhaps even much more. You had seen this confession coming from miles away and now that you've erased potential roadblocks that would render the situation too hot to handle, you can go ahead, full steam ahead, give Dirk the answer that you've been rehearsing for quite some time now, if you're being really honest with yourself.

JAKE: Well bro it seems like its your lucky day because ive been feeling the same way!

JAKE: Er towards you i mean.

JAKE: I think its only natural for strong friendships between best bros like us to -you know- develop in a positive direction!

JAKE: And well you are my bestest bro so...

JAKE: Consarn it what im trying to get at is that...

JAKE: I like you too dirk and um if it isnt too forward of me!!!

JAKE: Id like to be your boyfriend.

Gee fucking whiz, just the idea of saying it out loud makes your heart pitter patter violently in your chest. Could you imagine that? You, being someone's boyfriend? Being Dirk's boyfriend, of all people? Never in a million years did you think you could even meet someone else in the flesh, much less make a romantic connection with them. The more you think about it, the more it makes your cheeks flare up. Oh, and you haven't even gotten to the best part!

Dirk, surprised by your response, would have been left almost speechless, certainly a rarity on his part. Maybe he might've blushed a little, not having expected you to actually feel the same way. Maybe he might have broken out one of his rare smiles that you've only gotten to see through the grainy image of his webcam when you were able to figure out how to use video chat with him. The possibilities are endless! Though the one thing you know for sure is that he would have been very happy (you hope) and all there would be left to do is to seal the deal.

With a kiss of course.

Despite all the practicing you've done with your posters, nothing would be able to prepare you for the real thing. Paper would have nothing on warm skin as you dare to take Dirk's gloved hands and smile sweetly at

him. You've seen enough movies with enough kisses in them to give you an idea how to make this work, stepping closer to him and leaning forward, raising yourself on your tippy toes to reach him properly until his lips are brushing against yours and—

DIRK: Yo.

DIRK: Earth to english, I repeat, do you read me, English?

You almost spill the entirety of what's left of the milk into your bowl at the sound of his voice, threatening to overflow it and send your little bits of cereal all over Jane's kitchen countertop.

Your current reality of what happened once you entered the game is practically the complete opposite of what you had been imagining in your head. It's been a couple days since then and you're still nursing an awful concussion from having been launched multiple times on your mission to make it into the game alive and in one piece, so you've been put on house arrest in the meantime while you recover. Seeing as Jane's house is the most stocked with supplies and generally more put together, you've taken up residency there while your friends explore the strange new lands that have been summoned with your presence in the game. It's a bit irritating to have to sit out on the sidelines while your friends have fun, but it's hard to complain when just the simplest of lights or the slightest of noises can trigger an ear-splitting headache that makes your vision go spotty.

However, your friends have done their best to be accommodating. Jane is certainly being a good sport by letting you rest in the guest room, while Roxy talks your head off in her softest voice about all the strange things they've gotten to see on their mostly barren planets. Dirk just lingers in the back, listening to both of the girls, and makes sure you aren't getting too overstimulated. He also takes it upon himself to come see you first thing every day once you wake up to greet you and share his plans for the day. Which is what he's doing right now. Or would be, if you were listening to him.

JAKE: Oh haha good morning strider! Fancy to see you again.

DIRK: It's probably a quarter past one, I think we've gotten past the appropriate time frame for it to be morning.

JAKE: What the fuck? Really?

JAKE: Huh its sorta hard to tell when its constantly dark every single hour of the day.

JAKE: I havent really bothered to look at my phone and the clocks in janes house say different things.

DIRK: Yeah, I wouldn't bother with that. It seems like the concept of time doesn't exist in this void.

DIRK: Back on Earth, one would depend on the position of the sun to be able to tell the time.

DIRK: Seein' as there is no sun here, we're just throwing gum at the wall and hoping it sticks.

DIRK: I'm starting to lose track of the days already.

JAKE: Hasnt it been like six days at least?

DIRK: It's been more than that. You probably only recall six days because you were asleep for a long time after we got here. Probably skipped a day.

JAKE: No way! I would think i would remember if i slept an entire day????

DIRK: Don't hurt yourself trying. It's not like it matters anyway.

DIRK: We were just trying to gather our footing after that whole mess, nothing really to report home about.

DIRK: Talking about messes, how's your head?

Despite the recent development in your relationship, it doesn't feel like anything has changed between the two of you. Well! Save for the fact that you're now allowed to hold his hand when you please and also kiss him, you think? You haven't really tested it out much since he's been busy doing whatever he does best in a new situation, but you've certainly imagined many scenarios as to how you could do it. Like you were doing this morning.



scan to read the
rest of the fic

